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By EVA G. Andrews

MIRACLE OF YOUTH.

Many times I ask myself if I could do it all over again? Yes, I guess, but not with my mature head of now. It helps to be young, this is the story to prove it.

At the beginning of World War II., being a seventeen years old brunette helped me take tragedies of cruelty very lightheartedly. I survived in good health , because I took all happenings as an adventure rather than a reality.

In a little town, near the Czechoslovakian-Hungarian border, the Nazi occupation started as early as 1941. One of the first local citizens being arrested, was my jewish father. I had the privilege to carry food to our local prison as my father had diabetes . They had no diet available for political prisoners. After a few months to my greatest sorrow, this excursions to the prison had to cease,- my father has been transferred, without a forwarding address.... no good-bye... nor so-long... ~~as~~ we have lost track of him alltogether. He was a veteran among deportees. Rumors spread that all other jewish residents will be forced to a ghetto and from there to concentration camps. I was optimistic, playful, gay and in love for the first time. Nothing could scare me..... not even this rumour. My boyfriend, Hanzi, 10 years older than me, had a somewhat vague background, which was less important to me, at that time. He was tall, blond, handsome and a good sport. Girls were all crazy about him, this was what counts. He was not jewish, as a matter of fact , he was German. Elite nationality for 1942-43. Born in Leipzig, out of wedlock child. It so happened, his father had no time to marry the german girl of Leipzig as he died in Russia during World War I. Hanzi was 2 years old, when he was adopted by actually his father's parents, who lived in Senta of Yugoslavia. They heard about this illegitimate child of their lost son, brought him up with sincere love, but wisely they have foreseen the future and did not adjust his papers nor did they alter his religion. They were jewish themselves, but let Hanzi be a protestant, of his German mother's faith. They must have heard about Hitler, or were merely practical ? Hannzi was attached to his adopted parents, although they were not young any more, when he needed them most. They were well off and gave him a proper education.

I met Hanzi in Budapest, booming capital of Hungary. He was engaged there as a salesman . "Banana Island" the famous meeting place of Budapest, was where we had our first rendezvous. It was love at first sight which later developed in deeper emotion. He made passes on me, what required all my energy of tactful resistance. We made a gentleman's agreement, : "Don't ask me no questions- I will tell you no lies." I knew he had a mistress, but very wisely we never discussed her. We were going steady for over a year and Hanzi was a regular guest at my parent's house. He was quite popular with my mother and one elder sister, I had. We discussed future plans, but could not come to any conclusions, due to threatening war. Hanzi somehow managed to free himself from military service, being a "REICH'S DEUTSCHER" most trusted characters of Hitler's regime. His German was high class, which in addition to his appearance was a perfect alibi. We had to get ready for the Ghetto, those days .

My boyfriend worked out an escape plan for me, all on his own. I only had to follow his instructions. Nobody knew what his plans were with me, but we trusted him bluntly and my mother who suffered deeply for the loss of our beloved father, had full confidence in Hanzi. My only sister, Kathy, was more sentimental, serious and felt responsible for our mother, so she promised to stick to her. I had to bleach my brown hair to platinum blonde and keep it covered, secretly. This will help my appearance to be less semitic. The night before we were supposed to be concentrated into ghettos, Hanzi came to pick me up. He only told my mother, not to believe any letter she will receive through the police department. I will be safe, using other identifications. He did not want to say anything else as he was afraid, if they question my mother or sister, they might force out every information they might know. So it's best if they do not know more, than he really could tell them. I left that night, walking out of our house, with my coat on - sporting the Yellow Star-mark of being Jewish. Ready to answer patrolmen's question": I am going to look for some field work " - which was the only permitted way to avoid Ghetto. My lucky star was with me till the city limit, where Hanzi was waiting for me. He made me take off my "Yellow Mark" comb out my bleached hair and told me to behave as his careless girlfriend. We kissed and giggled ... walked then stopped for a kiss again.... when a Jeep full of German

soldiers approached. Hanzi stopped them, asked for a lift to the nearby city of Komarno, and without any hesitation, they took us. His energetic request, was nearly an order, his excellent German and his appearance scared the soldiers, they must have thought Hanzi is a Commanding Officer on leave. We did not speak in the car, holding hands we only kept on looking at each other.... Was I afraid? No, I was young, in Love and Hanzi was near me. Our first move was success, we got a lift by those, whom we were hiding from. We got out in Komarno, city on the shores of Danube river. The hotel owner had no doubt of our identity as we were dropped by a German Jeep before the door. We checked in a room where I had to start learning about my new-self. A very original birth-certificate of Hanzi's mistress, was the subject I had to major in. I was Papay Anna-Aranka now, a drama-student. Few years older than myself, my parents lived in the country, I had to learn their names, age and all other important details. The original Aranka, had the photocopy of her own birth-certificate and agreed to help Hanzi with his plans, only because she did not care to marry him anyway, as long as he will support her while her studies to be an actress. We never really met and I was very jealous, though I had to be immensely grateful to her. With a little make-up magic I was now ready to graduate for alias Anna -Aranka Papay. Next step was to get rid of my real identity. Hanzi went out to the shores of Danube to determine where the best spot would be for committing a suicide. Very often bodies were found floating in this river, so he discovered ^{an} ~~that~~ certain abandoned place, most suitable for a desperate girl to jump in the water. I had to write a farewell letter to my mother, in the meantime, asking her to forgive me - as I decided to rather kill myself than being taken to a concentration camp. This was the first time I was overcome by tears... softness, but still no fear. When Hanzi returned, I regained my confidence and at night, shortly after midnight, I had to do it. My boyfriend followed from very far as I walked slowly to my suicide point. Due curfew, there were no people on the streets. Everything went smoothly, nobody saw me when I left my overcoat with the Yellow star and my purse with my identifications, farewell letter, few pennies, etc... at the bank of river Danube, somewhere in early 1943. From then on, I was a fugitive....

Now on to the next step. Back at the Hotel, Hans took out a few letters addressed to Papay Anna-Aranka, care of himself,. They were answeres to his situation wanted add in a local Hungarian newspaper. Offering my services as a governess the choice of job-openings were indeed big. Not many Hungarian , Non-jewish, girls had knowledge of some foreign languages and education in music too. I spoke 4-5 languages and plaid piano. Our choice fall for Orgovany, a small village in the heart of Hungary. The local pharmacist needed a governess for his 2 children. I had to clear out from Budapest shortly, as the original Papay AnnaeAranka lived there legally and ~~would~~ could not risk double identity. She was a decent human being, I had to appreciate her sacrifice , though jealousy nearly broke my heart.

The first of next month I was supposed to start my services at Orgovany. We went by train but separated before the train stopped. It would not look nice for a governess to be accompanied by a boy-friend. My employer picked me up by his horse-drawn-carriage and Hans followed walking his way in. We were supposed to see each other later in the day,

~~when~~

My employer was unaware of my origin and happened to be a very decent fellow, we made friends shortly and as I was quite good with children, they also showed their affection towards me the first few hours after we met. It so happened everything was dandy except I forgot my key from my suitcase with Hanz. We agreed upon seeing each other somehow in the village, where I was supposed to ask my employeer's children to show me around. My boy-friend's tremendous ingenuity and wit at the spur of the moment solved this problem . We did go for a walk later in the day and I spotted Hanz on Main-Square. As I approached, accompanied by 6 year old Ildiko and 4 year old Jancsika, I realized, that my friend is humming a tune to himself, which was very unusual, knowing him long enough. Nearing to his side, I saw him drop something, bend... and pick up my key, saying : "Lady, you dropped something " and handing me my keys with a smile, he continued humming this unknown tune : " If all is O.K.-lalala... I'll leave you now and write you soon... lalala... keep well..so long...good luck..tra-la-la-la-la...." Nobody knew this was our good-bye, tears came to my eyes ... but I had to control my sentimentality, which I succeeded thanks to my youth again.. and the blabber of my new children.. Hanz left soon after, back to Budapest.

The pharmacist, Mr. Bogнар, was a leading citizen of Orgovany and his family was quite popular too. Shortly the whole village knew about the new governess there and they gave me a nice welcome, of course nobody suspected anything of my origin. By teaching the children I studied their religion myself. Playing piano we sang psalms and as the local catholic priest was a personal friend of Mr. Bogнар, we all had the pleasure of having the first row reserved in church for everyday's worship. Soon I became the leader of the local choir as per the pharmacist recommendation and the priest's own request. For compensation, I had permanent transportation to the next biggest city, Kecskemet, on my days off, which I had frequently visited in order to have my hair dyed secretly. The Catholic Priest's horse drawn buggy was a perfect alibi those days, still I had to carefully answer some inquisitive questions: " Are you bleaching your hair in order not to look semmitic ? Only jewish girls do that, you don't need it," was a usual one. It did not only help me look arian, but also to look 25, as per my birthcertificate, though sometimes I felt like telling the whole world I am only 17 indeed. It was also difficult to adjust myself to answer the name: Anna-Aranka... when I was deeply in my thoughts and my lady-employer called me. She severally asked me if I am hard of hearing..or what ? But besides these little incidents, which either skipped their suspicion or Bogнар's were too naive regarding Hitler's power,- I had a fairly good time at their house and honestly performed my duties too. Time was flying fast and as Summer came, we have moved to a famous Hungarian resort-place, the Lake Balaton, where Bogнар's owned a Summer-house. This was where Hanz visited us the first time officially, introducing himself as my fiancée. He had a natural charm and as always everywhere, he also impressed my employers with his personality. We had a few precious hours together, talked about the present and future. Discussed details regarding any next steps. Germans were just about to loose the war and our friends the Russians are nearing to liberate Budapest and all Hungary. The closer the Russians are, the readier I had to be to meet him again. Meanwhile wait and keep on pretending to be with the Germans. Airplanes kept on cruising above lake Balaton too, bombing ceaselessly. I had to dive under water once, when a German fighter got hit by Russian planes. Villages, cities were destroyed... by bombs.

Citizens were building shelters and were moving in to live in them. My employer was very upset, while this close war was on and started to plan evacuation for his whole family. This of course included me, as we grew very attached to each other with the children in particular. I had a hard time, to let them know, I cannot follow them with the Germans. No reason was good enough for convincing. Of course I could not let them know, who I was, why I want to return to Budapest, where Russians are close already and fights are tough. Had to think of something very very serious and important... so I talked to Mrs. Bognar one night eye-to-eye and invented a new secret : I have an illegitimate child in Budapest .. waiting for me with Hanz together.. whom I have to take care of. This was a good enough reason, she understood and let me go, without further notice. Wish I could tell them though, one day, sometimes... that this was not really true.

My saved money was enough for a freight-train ride into Budapest. It was not a pleasure ride as the nearer we came to the Capital, the more Russians were seen all over, occupying the enemy owned cities, villages and taking over one and all. They won the war... and were not afraid of showing their victory. They behaved like savages, drank everything that contained alcohol, raped all women that wore skirts..... no exceptions. If Hungarian so enemy, *davaj..* just give... if Jewish, so friend but be grateful.. also *davaj...* just give. I had a bad time getting through the front line unharmed and was very relieved when I felt Hanz's arms protecting me again. I talked my way out, on the train ride, when in the dark one Russian tried to force himself on me... my little Slavich knowledge and my wit helped me escape his determined will to get me. But I feared to see him again somewhere in Budapest, full of Russian soldiers than, and they all looked alike to me... My boyfriend led me to a hide-out shelter as the city was but ruins itself, trash, garbage, dead horses, dogs all over the once beautiful city. Some Germans were hiding in some districts still, ruthlessly killing anyone they spotted... no way out for them... they fought on streets till last minute. Shelters were not safe either, so we had to flee from one to another... often just escaped death... as one collapsed behind us... or soldiers broke in fighting, shooting... Just a few days away from total liberation, before the very end of this horrible second world war.. some Germans still

had enough power to occupie the house, we had a secret hide-out with some other Yugoslav underground workers. They arrested us, took as to a nearby school-building and started shooting without interrogation, all their prisoners. I was exhausted, lost sight of Hanz and nearly collapsed, when a young German good natured soldier, said : "DONT CRY-LAUGH" which I wholeheartedly did, when one of their S/S man said my birthcertificate was false.. as I knew the document was original... only me... I was false... so I laughed, laughed.. hysterical laughter saved ~~my~~ this time. They beleived me... miraculously, and let me go. Hanz proved his German origin fast, with his perfect "Hoch's Deitsch" language, so he was waiting for me already... and we walked, just walked.... no bombing, no fighting ~~x~~ scared us any longer, if ^{we} ~~you~~ escaped this... nothing will kill us now. So it was.. we survived it allt luckyly in good helth ...

January, 1945... some underground Yugoslavians got together, built a sled from the ruins left on the streets, and started off walking, towards, than already a free Yugoslavia...

Hanzi proudly took me to his native country, which he loved immensely and no doubt expected me to join his affection towards it.

We had a tough trip, through frost and snow-storms, but felt like pilgrimms. Optimistic walking hopefully to a new life.. reborn. Yes, born again, indeed.... as in order to be able to marry Hanz, I had to establish my original identity, by obtaining my r e a l birthcertificate, or else his once upon a time mistress, Anna-Aranka Papay would be now his legal wife, not the little jewish girl, whose best weapon to go through all these, was her unlimited youth.

